



Governor Terry E. Branstad
Lt. Governor Kim Reynolds
San Wong, Director

Commissioner Responsibilities

Citizen boards and commissions are a time-honored tradition in Iowa. The appointment of citizens to boards and commissions attached to each of the agencies in the Executive Branch of Iowa State government gives Iowa citizens an opportunity to be represented by their peers in the development of public policy.

When you accept an appointment with an Iowa board or commission, you automatically assume certain responsibilities, which go with that appointment.

As a Commission member...

- You have a role in guiding your commission in the accomplishment of specific goals and objectives
- It is up to you and other members of your commission to establish a mission and move to accomplish that mission.
- It is your responsibility to notify the Governor's office in writing if you are resigning; changing your address, changing your employment status, changing your political party registration ; or wish to be considered for reappointment.

You need to:

- Have a clear understanding of the Department of Human Rights' area of responsibility
- Study the Iowa Code sections and Administrative Rules that apply to the Department of Human Rights
- Know how your commission is accountable to the Department of Human Rights and the Governor.

Characteristics of an Effective Commissioner

The ability to:

- Work with other Commission members and the Department of Human Rights' staff
- Communicate effectively
- Use decision-making skills
- Study, discuss and determine proposed policy and policy changes
- Function in large and small meetings
- Assemble and evaluate information
- Complete homework by the established deadline

A Commission Member's Approach to the Job

One of the reasons a Commissioner's job can be difficult is that "the job" is essentially a group responsibility. In fact, it is hard to discuss how an individual is to approach a group task. Yet each Commission member has a responsibility to come with an effective mindset, to carry out his or her part of preparation and participation, and to take responsibility for the group. These are not always easy tasks.

Some advice follows on the frame of mind and individual preparations necessary for a Commissioner to plan an effective role in creating a productive commission.

1. **Be prepared to participate responsibly.** Participating responsibly means to complete your homework in a timely manner, come prepared to work (sometimes the work is to listen), agree and disagree as your values dictate, and accept the group decision as legitimate even if not-in your opinion-correct.
2. **Be responsible for group behavior and productivity.** While doing your own job, as a single member is important, it does not complete your responsibility. You may shoulder the potentially unfamiliar burden of being responsible for the group. That is, if you are part of a group that doesn't get its job done, you are culpable.
3. **Be a proactive Commission Member.** You are a Commissioner to make governance decision, not to hear reports. Of course, sometimes it is important to get data through reports, but don't let that cast you in a passive role. Even when you are receiving education, do so as an active participant, searching for knowledge that will enable good Commission decisions.
4. **Use your special expertise to inform your colleague's knowledge.** If you work in accounting, law, construction, or another skilled field, be careful not to take your colleagues off the hook with respect to commission decisions about such matters. To illustrate, an accountant commission member shouldn't assume personal responsibility for assuming fiscal soundness. However, it is all right for him or her to help commission members understand what fiscal jeopardy looks like. With that knowledge, the board can pool its human values about right, brinkmanship, and overextension, and so forth in the creation of fiscal policies. In other words, use your special understanding to inform the board's knowledge, but not to substitute for it.
5. **Don't tolerate putting off the big issues forever.** The really big issues will often be too intimidating for you to reach a solution comfortably. Yet in most cases, the decision is being made anyway by default. Commission inaction itself is a decision.
6. **Honor divergent opinions without being intimidated by them.** You are obligated to register your honest opinion on issues the Commission takes up, but other commission members are obligated to speak up as well. Encourage your colleagues to express their opinions without allowing your own to be submerged by louder or more insistent comrades.

7. **Support the Commissions final choice.** No matter which way you voted, you are obligated to support the Commission's choice. This obligation doesn't mean you must pretend to agree with that choice; you may certainly maintain the integrity of your dissent even after the vote. What you must support is the legitimacy of the choice that you still don't agree with.
8. **Honor the common mission of the commission.** Remember that the organization does not exist to satisfy board members' needs to feel useful, self-actualized, involved, or entertained. Of course, it's fine to feel these things and perfectly acceptable to seek whatever fulfillment governance can give you. But the role of a commissioner should be in the determination of what the Department of Human Rights' should accomplish as a whole.

Frequently asked Questions

- **Can I refer individuals to the Office of Latino Affairs for any issues?**

Yes, please refer constituents to us. We will assist them with many issues and refer them to other agencies as appropriate. It would also be beneficial if you explained that the Commission of Latino Affairs works in conjunction with the Office of Latino Affairs.

- **How much time will I spend preparing for a meeting?**

As much as you need to feel comfortable with the agenda and materials that will be discussed at the meeting. The group is more effective if everyone is prepared.

- **What is a conflict of interest?**

This is defined in the code of Iowa; however, a good rule of thumb is to be very careful of ethics. Anything that might be construed as a conflict of interest should be avoided at all costs. (see [Code of Iowa Chapter 68B.2A](#))

Commission Members Circle

